





D8  
P10  
1877

## THE EMBROIDERY OF HISTORY.

NOT long ago one of Napoleon's veterans, a soldier of the Old Guard, wrote a letter to a Belgian newspaper, declaring in emphatic words, and on the strength of distinct personal remembrance, that Cambronne did say at Waterloo, "La Garde meurt, et ne se rend pas." Though this old warrior heard with his own ears the much disputed phrase, and now gives his name and address for the benefit of skeptics who may desire to cross-examine him, nevertheless Cambronne never said anything of the sort. The phrase was the coinage of Rougemont, who, shortly after Waterloo, in the "Indépendant," put it into the mouth of Cambronne, who thereupon indignantly disowned it; as well he might, since, instead of dying on the field, he had surrendered, as became a brave man in hopeless straits.

The Rougemonts of literature are many and audacious; and with such subtlety do they weave their plausible yarns, that sometimes these shams go for ever unsuspected into the fabric of history; while, in other cases, if suspected, the fraud is only shown by great labor and research, and is not even then wholly unravelled out of the tapestry of national annals.

One of the bits of history most familiar to Americans is Jackson's battle of New Orleans, where, from behind his breastwork of cotton bales (a material which the enemy's cannon could not pierce), he repulsed with prodigious slaughter Pakenham's veterans, fresh from their European victories. This story of the rampart of cotton, as related in both English and American histories, is, however, purely apocryphal. Its origin seems to have been the fact that, many days before the battle of January 8 (for Jackson's troops had been working steadily at the intrenchments since Christmas), about fifty cotton bales

were taken out of a neighboring flat-boat and thrown into a line of earthworks to increase its bulk. About a week before the assault, in a preliminary skirmish, as Walker tells us in his "Jackson and New Orleans," the enemy's balls, striking one of these bales, knocked it out of the mound, set fire to the cotton, and sent it flying about, to the great danger of the ammunition. All the bales were consequently removed. "After this," continues the account, "no cotton bales were ever used in the breastwork. The mound was composed entirely of earth dug from the canal and the field in the rear. The experiment of using cotton and other articles in raising the embankment had been discarded."

Again, for eighteen years after this battle it was gospel with us that the British officers at dawn "promised their troops a beautiful dinner in New Orleans, and gave them 'Booty and beauty' as the parole and countersign of the day." In 1833 General Lambert and four other British officers, who had been engaged in the luckless expedition, denied this story, which accordingly has measurably vanished out of history. The absurd fiction of the "Booty and beauty" watchword reappears, however, at intervals in our own civil war, ascribed to General Beauregard and other Confederate officers.

Our ancestors, also, used to enjoy the story of Putnam's exploit at Horse-neck, where he escaped from a party of Tryon's troopers by forcing his horse down a flight of seventy stone steps (another account swells them to a hundred) that formed the stairway by which the villagers ascended to the church on the brow of the hill. This is the narrative in Peters's "History of Connecticut," a book which Dwight calls "a mass of folly and falsehood." The story of the stairway is sheer fab-

rication, founded on the fact that common stones here and there aided the villagers to ascend the hill; yet there exist pictures of Putnam charging down a long tier of steps as well defined and regular as those of the capitol at Washington, while the discomfited dragoons at the top pour in a volley that does not harm him.

A partial parallel to this exaggeration may be found in the current descriptions of "Sheridan's ride" at Winchester, a solid exploit, brilliantly touched up in Buchanan Read's verse, concerning which last the great cavalry general is said to have jocosely remarked that if the bard had seen the horse, he never would have written the poem.

The embroiderers of history may be trusted to duly stitch into Custer's last fight (a story sadder far than even that of Lovell's massacre, which wrung our schoolboy hearts) the figure of our *preux chevalier*, with long hair flying, as on Virginia fields, leading a sabre charge against the red devils, and falling a prey to an Indian marksman who had recognized the dreaded foe of his race. There was not a sabre in the column; Custer's hair was cropped; and the evidence goes to show that no Indian recognized him during the battle.

Everybody remembers how for many years after Wilkes Booth was hunted down by cavalry, and was shot in a barn by Corbett, there were stories that he had never been killed, but had escaped to Australia, where "intelligent gentlemen" had seen him. This sort of delusion is familiar in history. King Harold died on the day of St. Calixtus, and was buried on the fatal field of Hastings; but this did not prevent Giraldus, Æthelred of Rievaulx, and sundry other chroniclers in years following from making Harold escape alive to Saxony and Denmark, whence, after in vain seeking help to overthrow William, he returned to England, and devoted his last days to penance in a cell at Chester. It was probably the wish, as father to the thought, that started among Harold's

followers the rumor of his escape and his seeking for aid to return; analogous hopes or fears furnish the origin of many like delusive traditions.

When Farragut was starting, after our civil war, on his European cruise, Secretary Seward telegraphed him the playful admonition, "Do not glide too often to the masthead." The allusion was to the Admiral's prowess in Mobile bay, where popular fancy pictured him as directing the battle from the region of the masthead of the Hartford, whither he had "glided" before the battle, and where he had caused his men to "lash him," lest he should fall on being hit by the enemy's sharpshooters. The true version was given in his official report; namely, that he had stepped from the deck into the shrouds in order to see above the smoke of his flagship's guns; and as the smoke rolled up higher he also went up, till he found himself "in an elevated position in the main rigging, near the maintop." But popular history prefers to lash him up higher and against the mast ("He had caused himself to be lashed in the maintop," says Abbott's "Civil War in America," "and communicated his orders through speaking tubes"); while Mr. Seward, in asking the hero not to glide "too often" to the masthead, suggests how the fiction after all got the better of the fact.

The biographies of Nelson have a like embroidering in regard to England's great naval captain at Trafalgar. "It being known," says one of these books, "that there were select musketeers throughout the French ships, many of them Tyrolese, he was entreated to lay aside the frock coat bearing his various decorations, as these might cause him to be singled out; but with a sort of infatuation, he refused, saying, 'In honor I gained them, and in honor I will die with them.'" The reply was worthy of the hero who had shouted at Cape St. Vincent, "Westminster Abbey or glorious victory!" But Captain (afterward Sir Thomas) Hardy, many years



later, said that he had indeed expressed a fear that the embroidered order of the Bath might attract the enemy's fire, and that Nelson's reply had simply been that he knew there was danger, but it was "too late now to shift a coat." One queries, since Nelson has become so much of a Sunday-school exemplar, whether divers of the famous religious ejaculations attributed to him are not also built up on a somewhat slender foundation.

While English lads read this story of Nelson's coat at Trafalgar, French boys thrill at being told how the *Vengeur* went down with flags flying, under the broadsides of three English vessels. Driven successively from the lower to the upper tiers of guns by the rising waters, "still refusing to strike their colors, and shouting, 'Vive la République,' the crew went down with their ship." True it is that the *Vengeur* went down; but it was as an English prize, and the crew that perished in her was a crew of her captors. Nevertheless for many years the fable held its ground everywhere in France against the fact, as in painting and poesy, at least, it does to this day.

Returning to our civil war, we find it generally stated that Grant fought Lee in the Wilderness with odds of more than two to one. The best of American unprofessional military writers says that "Lee's army at this time numbered 52,626 men of all arms," while "Grant held in hand 130,000 men." Lee's last field report prior to the battle did indeed show "Present for duty, 53,891," but these figures excluded Longstreet's corps, then at Gordonsville, which at that date had "Present for duty, 18,387," and took part in the battle of the Wilderness. Grant's 130,000 was a "total" including sick and detached, as well as "present for duty," some of its detached forces being a hundred miles away. According to Badeau's citation of Grant's field report of even date with Lee's, the force "present for duty" under the former was 98,019; so that on this authority he fought the Wil-

derness with fewer than 100,000 men, while Lee put into the field upward of 70,000. This is but a single example of a class of errors in popular history whose number is legion.

Turning now to a different sort of historic events, some readers who visited the Centennial Exhibition may remember having had pointed out to them the cottage just above Belmont where Tom Moore lived, seventy odd years ago, and where he is supposed to have written "*Alone by the Schuylkill a wanderer roved.*" There is not, however, a scrap of evidence that Tom Moore's cottage was ever seen by Mr. Moore. The poet, to begin with, passed only a fortnight in Philadelphia, and boarded in its densely populated part; his brief stay was a round of party-going and social life, and Tom Moore's cottage is a latter-day romance.

These last year's tourists, too, may have read or had recounted to them the story of how the old Independence bell originally "proclaimed liberty throughout the land." When the Declaration was voted, a lad rushed from the hall where Congress sat to the street in front, and shouted to the old bell-ringer to "ring"; and ring the graybeard did, with a clangor that roused the whole city to the glad tidings. This, we say, is the story, cut out of whole cloth by George Lippard. Nothing of the kind ever occurred.

In few departments of history has modern critical analysis made greater havoc than in that of the famous sayings and "last words" of illustrious men. Doubts have at length been cast even on the *Et tu, Brute*, of Cæsar, and the *E pur si muove* of Galileo. Talleyrand's impromptus are now discovered to have been (like Sheridan's) well conned, and also to have been largely derived from a jest-book called "*L'Improvisateur Français.*" Fourier tells us that the Rougemont who invented his *mot* for Cambronne, performed the like amiable service for several other illustrious men; and of Harel, editor of the "*Nain Jaune*," he

remarks that this gentleman was in the habit of fathering his bright sayings on famous men, with a view of reclaiming his offspring in case the public should receive them well for the sake of their supposed parentage; for example, with true journalistic genius he invented an "interview" between Talleyrand and a lad, for the purpose of ascribing to the former the famous phrase, still credited to the diplomat, "Language was given to man to disguise his thoughts"—an epigram, however, originally made by Voltaire.

Louis Blanc, in his "History of Ten Years," records that, in the famous Diebitsch campaign against Poland in 1831, Skrzynecki, the Polish general, after performing prodigies of valor at Ostrolenka, reluctantly gave orders at night to retreat from the field he had so bravely held, "and, as he stepped into his carriage with Prondzynski, sadly repeated the famous words of Kosciusko, 'Finis Poloniæ.'" This is very well, but Kosciusko, who is commonly thought to have pronounced these words as he fell, terribly wounded, on the fatal field of Maciejowice, October 10, 1794, expressly wrote afterward that he had never uttered them, and never could have had the conceit, even had he the want of patriotism, to imagine that his expected death was to be the "end of Poland." Evidently, however, with Skrzynecki the embroidery had covered up the history—unless, indeed, his repetition of "Finis Poloniæ" be as apocryphal as its original utterance.

It is well known that Stonewall Jackson got his *sobriquet* from General Bee, who at Bull Run is said to have exclaimed, by way of encouragement to his worn men, on seeing Jackson's brigade still fresh, and drawn up in line ready for action, "There is Jackson, standing like a stone wall"; whence he is Stonewall for ever. But within a few months a reputable newspaper has contained a letter declaring, on the authority of a Confederate staff officer, that what Bee said was: "Men,

we have got to win this battle alone. There stands Jackson, like a stone wall, and will not help us. Let every man that is a man follow me." The probabilities are enormously in favor of the received version, but we see how doubts gather over what has been thought fully settled history.

The Germans have taken care sometimes to set their last war with France aright in history, from their point of view, by issuing an official narrative of it from General Moltke's headquarters. With like anxiety for the "truth of history," as well as for personal vindication, Prince Bismarck has repudiated the famous aphorism which Frenchmen attributed to him: "La force prime le droit." It was once believed, and perhaps still is, in France, that the cynical Chancellor uttered these words during the peace negotiations; and the very authority for the story was given, Count Schwerin, who accordingly disowned it. But a collection of Bismarck's speeches is said to show that he repudiated the phrase no fewer than five times in the Chamber at Berlin—a fact which suggests how the sham sayings of great men stick, and are hard to be got rid of. And despite his repeated denials, perhaps "might before right" may take its place in history as "Bismarck's maxim."

General Grant is popularly credited with inventing the humorous epithet "bottled up," as applied to General Butler's position at Bermuda Hundreds, in the last year of our civil war. The phrase does appear with this application in Grant's official report, but it had previously been originated by Butler, and applied to himself, in a communication to Grant. A parallel occurs in the proclamation which Louis Napoleon issued after his *coup* of December 2, containing the words *je suis sorti de la légalité pour rentrer dans le droit*. The telling phrase is his in history, but it was really formulated by a humble curé near Nancy, whose felicitous expression, *il est sorti*, etc., was forwarded through the Bishop to

the Prince, who "assimilated" it forthwith.

When Louis XVI. perished on the scaffold, saying, "I die innocent; I pardon my enemies; and you, unhappy people—" a roll of the drums, as we know, drowned his sentence, and the executioners, from whose grasp he had broken, seized him again, while the Abbé Edgeworth cried, "Son of Saint Louis, ascend to heaven!" This, at least, is the received story, though modern criticism has now set down the Abbé's exclamation among the purely fictitious flowers on the *parterre* of history.

And would not many another famous ejaculation be recognized as false were close scrutiny possible? Did Louis XIV. make those exemplary remarks from his death-bed to his great grandson and successor, the little Duke of Anjou? Did he turn to his officers and say, "Why weep you? Had you thought me immortal?" It was long ago noted that the germ of many sayings attributed to modern monarchs by their courtiers or chroniclers may be found in Greek and Latin lore, or else the stories are rechristened bodily. Scholars have often played the sycophant, and misused their erudition for princely favor; toad-eaters find their account in transferring to their sovereigns the credit of their wit. And not only of different princes, but of many illustrious men and women, we find substantially the same stories told in different ages, as it would be exceedingly easy to show by example. Nay, even in very commonplace and humble life we hear the same anecdote, eccentricity, or experience attributed to several different people, when it is perhaps as old as the language.

History also has a trick of condensing, by the evaporation of time, a diffuse saying into an epigram, and of turning, if need be, an indecorous exclamation into a noble phrase, fit for all to hear. She has pruned the message of Francis I., after Pavia, to the splendid "Madame, all is lost, save

honor"; whereas, instead of half a dozen words, the King wrote thirty, ending, "*de toutes choses ne m'est demeuré, que l'honneur et la vie qui est sauve.*" History, which has so kindly dealt with Cambronne's real ejaculation at Waterloo, has been equally generous with Taylor's at Buena Vista, substituting for his message to the Mexican general the well-known but most questionable phrase: "Tell Santa Anna General Taylor never surrenders."

The passion of mankind for hero worship is one cause of embroidery in history. We do not like to admit flaws in our historic models, and would fain hide them a little from view. The worshipper of the great Condé or the great Gregory VII. does not dwell on his insignificant stature. The enthusiastic lover of Nelson's gallantry and Byron's genius has a cloak of forgetfulness for their immoralities.

Popular taste would have military heroes imposing in presence as well as doughty in deed—a relic of impression by inheritance from what was anciently true, that prowess in battle required men of brawn rather than of brain. After its long experience of the outgoing of spears and breastplates and the incoming of steam and gunpowder, the popular mind still does not quite realize that stalwart Marshal Saxe, who twists a horseshoe like a wisp of straw in his fingers, is less formidable than aged Moltke, and that battles are planned in the closet and fought by telegraph. The popular conception of a great general is illustrated in the colored prints of the Bowery show windows. He bestrides a coal-black charger, from whose glistening eyes and distended nostrils red flames are shooting; he waves on high a sword fit for Goliath: bombs burst idly in thick profusion about the charmed hero, though dead soldiers are piled three or four deep around his horse's hoofs; steed and cavalier are of Brobdignagian mould, and the total is labelled "Major General Sherman at Resaca," or "Sheridan at Five Forks," as the case may be. Yet we know



that if Hancock, and Franklin, and Thomas were mighty in stature and massive in thew and limb, the reverse is true of Sheridan, and Grant, and McClellan. The popular idea of an infantry charge appears, also, in the old-fashioned pictures, where a straight line drawn from the bayonet tip on the extreme right of the charging regiment to the tip of the bayonet on the extreme left, would just graze every intermediate weapon.

The painter, whether with pen or brush, has not always skill or candor enough to present his hero in his faults of body and soul; besides, the hero himself has rarely so little vanity as to expose his own defects and deformities. If an occasional Cromwell stoutly demands to be painted with his wart, illustrious men are not equally eager to set forth their moral blemishes and mental blunders, but suffer their reports and their official chroniclers to excuse or deftly disguise them.

National pride and various kinds of partisanship also resent the rough handling of historic heroes. The portrait of William Penn which Macaulay drew roused the indignation of many Quakers, in whose minds Penn had come to be a figure quite free from the human frailties which the historian ascribed to him. When Thackeray, in the "Virginians," sketched Washington as an ordinary mortal, falling in love and quarrelling in a very ordinary way, the picture shocked many Americans, for Washington is our patron saint. We had preferred to divest him of the frivolous gallantries in which youth commonly indulge, and to think of him as "loving but once," when he led the widow Custis to the altar. Bishop Meade, however, tells us, in his "Old Churches and Families of Virginia," that Miss Cary had previously captivated the affections of young Washington, and rejected the offer of his hand; and there are rumors of other like experiences in Washington's life.

A rare, perhaps solitary lapse into profanity, under sudden irritation, is

hardly a matter to be concealed in Washington's life, since it really serves to bring into the light of positive virtues his habitual self-restraint and decorum; yet some eulogists would gloss even that speck on the sun. Such eulogists think it wise to figure our first President as a recognized demigod among his contemporaries, ignoring the fact that hostile newspapers called him a traitor, an ally of Britain, "a stupendous monument of perfidy, ingratitude, and degeneracy," and that his impeachment was called for. While the treaty with England, which he favored, was under discussion, "his merits," says Young, "as a soldier and statesman, were disparaged. His private character did not escape detraction. He was accused of having overdrawn the amount of his salary and appropriated the money to his private use." Washington himself, in regard to the attacks of the press upon him for his treaty policy, wrote that he could not have believed that every act of his administration would be tortured, and the grossest misrepresentations of them made, "and that, too, in such exaggerated and indecent terms as could scarcely be applied to a Nero, a notorious defaulter, or even to a common pickpocket."

Historical romances are of course responsible for a good deal of popular misconception about famous events and personages; but it is doubtful whether any department in the whole range of imaginative literature has given so widespread entertainment and instruction. To some people these novels furnish their chief knowledge of many parts of history; for others they clothe dry bones with flesh and breathe life into lay figures. Historical novels are deservedly made the source of much satire, by reason of the abominations that pass under their name; but we cannot cry down a class of writing illumined by the pens of Dumas and Erckmann-Chatrian, of Cooper and Hawthorne, of Scott and Thackeray. Only, in order to make a true historical novel, it is by no means



ough to pepper its pages with "prithrees," "marrys," "welladays," "churls," "benisons," and "dunsons beneath the castle's moat." And again, when novelists play such tricks with established events and illustrious people as to mislead the ignorant reader, their historical studies of course deserve censure.

To the poets, the painters, and the dramatists a still greater license is due than to the novelists, in historical productions, and they have taken the full benefit of this privilege. For our English-speaking race Shakespeare, not Hume or Lingard, is the historian of the houses of York and Lancaster and Tudor. It is he and not they to whom we owe the Prince Hal and the Gloster whose images are stamped on our minds. "I might remind my critics," says Mr. W. G. Willis, an English writer of historical plays, "that Macbeth was, in history, a good and humane monarch, and never murdered Duncan; that Wolsey's disgrace was only temporary, and that he regained the favor of Henry; that there is no authority for an interview between Elizabeth and Mary, etc." And it is familiar experience that the playwrights are often suffered to sacrifice literal truth to picturesque effect.

The sculptors on their part put Jefferson and Webster in Roman togas, while the painters (as one of our national frescoes bears witness) compel Putnam to plough in a blue cloak. Where there is a clearly romantic treatment of historical themes no misconception is created, precisely as there is none when, on the ceiling of some public hall, Washington appears drawn through heavy, breaking clouds by Apollo's steeds, to meet Lafayette, who comes in an aerial ship, blown forward by fat-cheeked zephyrs; for everybody comprehends the difference between allegory and actuality, and admits that to allow no scope for the imagination would make photography the most meritorious of all artistic appliances. But if a painter undertakes to reproduce an exact scene at Gettys-

burg with all possible fidelity, and accumulates within half an acre twenty or thirty recognizable portrait figures of field and general officers who were really at the time represented scattered over half a mile of the battle-ground, the case is different.

We all remember an astonishing bit of sculpture at the Centennial Exhibition, representing the upper half of Washington joined to the back of an eagle. It was a monstrosity that struck some observers as simply hideous, but the majority, perhaps, as ludicrously preposterous in its odd audacity of conception. But you could hardly call the treating of Washington *à la Centaur* a deceptive or misleading use of historical subjects. It may be comical, to be sure, to figure our grave patron saint as—not exactly "half hoss and half alligator," like Roaring Ralph Stackpole, but half human and half aquiline; still, we allow a license of this sort, without objection on any but artistic grounds, whereas against a municipal statue of Lincoln which, instead of giving us his long, lank figure, furnishes a man with short, stumpy legs, we protest on grounds of historic falsification.

Perhaps that illustration from a kindred field may serve to show the difference between the deceptive and the harmless embroideries which the poets and the dramatists work upon history. Sometimes we are perhaps too scrupulous in insisting upon verbal accuracy with the poets in their treatment of historic themes. Whittier seems to have been overwhelmed and disheartened by the amount of topical criticism stirred up about his ballad of Barbara Fritchie and her flag. Still, the historic element in the verses which formed their basis could not fail to provoke rival schools of logicians, with Barbara and anti-Barbara arguments; whereas Longfellow, it is safe to presume, was never pestered to disclose the exact name and age of the extraordinary young man who, for purposes best known to himself, ascended an icy mountain

laden with a banner inscribed "Excelsior."

An instance of the value of contemporary records in fixing for ever its true character upon an important scene, destined otherwise, we might confidently presume, to be amazingly embroidered, is furnished in a passage from the diary of the late Chief Justice Chase, Secretary of the Treasury under President Lincoln. The issue of the emancipation proclamation forms an epochal event in American history, surpassed only in its kind, perhaps, by the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and destined, like that earlier event, to be the subject of study in art, oratory, and song. What the scene might have become, without authentic contemporary records, under the warm imaginations of painters and poets, it is hard to say; but the diary of Chief Justice Chase has imperishably portrayed the eventful Cabinet meeting of September 22, 1862, in a picture wonderfully simple, realistic, suggestive, and effective. "Went to the White House. All the members of the Cabinet were in attendance. There was some general talk, and the President mentioned that Artemus Ward had sent him his book. Proposed to read a chapter which he thought very funny. Read it, and seemed to enjoy it very much; the heads also (except Stanton). The chapter was 'High-Handed Outrage at Utica.' The President then took a graver tone, and said," etc. What the President then said—his introduction of the emancipation proclamation—offers so sharp and sudden contrast to the foregoing scene, and is withal so simple, serious, and noble, that one is sorry to strike out a line of it for the sake of brevity in citation. He took a graver tone and said:

"Gentlemen: I have, as you are aware, thought a good deal about the relation of this war to slavery, and you all remember that, several weeks ago, I read to you an order I had prepared upon the subject, which, on account of objections made by some of you, was not issued. Ever since then my mind has been occupied with the subject, and I have thought all along that the time for acting on it might probably come. I

think the time has come now. . . . When the rebel army was at Frederick I determined, as soon as it should be driven out of Maryland, to issue a proclamation of emancipation such as I thought most likely to be useful. I said nothing to any one, but I made a promise to myself and (hesitating a little) to my Maker. The rebel army is now driven out, and I am going to fulfil that promise. I have got you together to hear what I have written down. I do not wish your advice about the main matter, for that I have determined for myself. This I say without intending anything but respect for any one of you. But I already know the views of each on this question. . . . There is no way in which I can have any other man put where I am. I am here. I must do the best I can, and bear the responsibility of taking the course which I feel I ought to take." The President then proceeded to read his emancipation proclamation.

These words, tranquil, sincere, and solemn, bear the stamp of authenticity. They are coinage of the mint that produced the immortal speech at Gettysburg—speech whose few eloquent sentences sank so deeply into all hearers as to eclipse the labored oratory of gifted Everett. Not otherwise did those few words, just cited, sink into the mind of Chase, making it easy for him to reproduce them a few hours later in his diary.

Without this portrayal by a witness and an actor, what might not "history" have made of the scene? We should have had, doubtless, supposed speeches of Lincoln, of Seward, of Blair, and of others. The facts of the verbal alterations which were offered to the President, in accordance with his request for suggestions of change in the minor matter of expression, and which, as Mr. Chase records, the President at once accepted, would very likely have been ignored or distorted. Above all we might have had everything grandiloquent, high-stepping, profuse in epigrammatic patriotism, as becomes the lofty historic style. But the scene is more impressive in its homeliness. That strange opening from the jest-book, contrasting with the touchingly frank and grave words that instantly followed, sets out, by a strange chance, in a memorable scene, whereon the fate of a race depended, the two sides of Lincoln's nature or temperament, which two sides need-

ed to be crystallized together in history. And whereas at first thought the prefacing of the emancipation proclamation by a page out of Artemus Ward may be the subject of sarcasm as some future historian perchance will make it, yet the sense of incongruity passes away quite forgotten before the modest, resolute words of Abraham Lincoln are ended. At all events the scene is the true one, and has the matchless relish that truth gives; it is a scene ever memorable, though it may have spoiled a thousand novels and plays and pictures and poems, ready to be done in the heroic style.

Often, indeed, in history, there is nothing so affecting, so dramatic, so thrilling as the recorded fact, so that wise dramatists as well as chroniclers repeat without gloss what was actually said and done, to secure their greatest effects. The most picturesque and telling parts of history are not those in the *Ercles reinu*, for even great men are not always mounted on their battle chargers. "Esmond" insists that in his time the muse of history, no less than the tragic muse, wears the mask and the cothurnus, and speaks to measure; he saw King Louis XIV. in his decrepitude, and found that, "divested of poetry, this was but a little, wrinkled old man, pock-marked, and with a great periwig and red heels to make him look tall"; he saw Queen Anne driving her one-horse chaise—"a hot, red-faced woman, not in the least resembling that statue of her which turns its stone back upon St. Paul's." The best biographies show that it is not wise to cover up the hero's defects, round out his deficiencies, and present him perpetually in historic pose. Benjamin West astounded Reynolds and the conventional, trappings-hidden painters of his day by a touch of nature in the "Death of Wolfe"—a path which it had been better for his name to have followed, instead of becoming more academic and conventional than some of the men whom his comparative simplicity and freshness

had startled. "That art is the truest," says a cultivated writer, "which preserves and dignifies a defect. Let Agesilaus keep his hobble, and the Emperor's neck be awry in the marble. Biography admonishes pride when it displays Salmasius, the champion of kings, shivering under the eye and scourge of his wife, or bids us stand at the door of Milton's academy, and hear the scream and the ferule up stairs."

To the love of sensational scenery in history we owe the mythical politeness of Fontenoy, where, when Hay's regiment encountered that of D'Au-terroche, Hay rode out in front and with a bow said, "Gentlemen of the French Guards, fire first!" whereupon the Count responded, "We never fire first." Carlyle enjoys tearing up this gorgeous piece of embroidery, which was indeed too palpably false, one would think, to ever impose upon any but the most credulous.

Besides the embroidery which comes from sycophancy, from love of spectacular effect, from prejudice, or from ignorance, even a purely clerical blunder may perpetuate a mistake for centuries. Thus, from school-boy days, we may remember Dr. Goldsmith's assertion that, in the reign of Edward IV., "the Duke of Clarence, being granted a choice of the manner in which he would die, was privately drowned in a butt of Malmesey in the Tower; a whimsical choice, and implying that he had an extraordinary passion for that liquor." This story, in vogue for centuries, was adding insult to the poor duke's injury; for, as Bayley has shown, the original record, which was wrongly copied, only says that Clarence was killed, and his body, enclosed in a cask that once contained Malmesey wine, was thrown into the Thames.

But official contemporary records cannot always be trusted in history. "As lying as a bulletin" has become a proverb. Napoleon evidently treated official despatches like other appliances for accomplishment, and could



falsify them, if expedient, with as little compunction as he would have had in sending a false message into the hands of his enemy. Mr. Freeman tells us that the orthodox way, under William the Conqueror, was to look on the flight of Senlac as a sort of unhappy accident; and that in the official language William's entry is always spoken of as if it had been as peaceful as that of Charles II. or George I. The ignoring of Harold's reign he likens to the ignoring of Cromwell's rule in the acts of Parliament, which speak of 1660 as the twelfth year of King Charles—a kind of "regnal arithmetic which has given the world a Louis XVIII. and a Napoleon III."

Even the "honest Griffiths" of history may chronicle errors through unconscious partiality or inability to get at the facts. Besides, as falsehood travels half round the world while Truth is putting on its boots, there is a certain difficulty in stopping the historic counterfeit that once passes current. Cambronne's denial did not save the thrasonical phrase from being attributed to him in good faith in a hundred histories, and even verified, as we have seen, by a hearer, threescore years after. In truth eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses are among the greatest embroiderers of history. They are like that "Old Joe," immortalized by Lowell, who saw "hot Percy goad his slow artillery up the Concord road"; but each successive time he told his story, in later years, "to the main fight drew near,"

And, ere death came the lengthening tale to lop,  
Himself had fired, and seen a red-coat drop.

Again, the denial of an apocryphal story sometimes only causes it to break out afresh in another shape. Thus Bonnechose, who has a happy liking for famous sayings, and great care in not giving to any an unwarranted authenticity, says of Waterloo, "Sommés de mettre bas les armes, quelques bataillons mutilés de la vieille garde répondent par ce cri héroïque: 'La garde meurt et ne se rend pas.'"

Thus the result of correcting Rougemont was that Cambronne multiplied himself into several battalions.

When we turn to ancient history half the heroic stories (more's the pity) grow doubtful under modern criticism. Thus, mists gather round the anecdote of Archimedes burning the Roman ships, in the defence of Syracuse, by reflecting the sun's rays from a mirror, since Livy, Plutarch, and Polybius say nothing about it, and they could scarcely have passed it over in silence, if known to their age: the first record of the alleged feat comes centuries later. And numberless are the classical stories that are thus dropping out of the rank of fully credited facts. Voltaire, in his preface to the 1750 edition of his History of Charles XII., pleases himself by casting doubts on a dozen historic stories—on Plutarch's, that Caesar once threw himself in complete armor into the sea, holding in one hand papers which he wished to keep dry, and swimming with the other; on Curtius's, that Alexander (though a pupil of Aristotle) and his generals were astonished at seeing the tides of the ocean, of which they had never heard. Voltaire even doubts (though on slender grounds) Livy's story that the physician of Pyrrhus offered the Romans to poison his master for a bribe. Then, coming down to later times, Voltaire makes havoc with the yarns of historians and travellers like Father Maimbourg, Mezeray, Sieur de Joinville, and others, as any reader may see by referring to him.

Fictitious personages come and go in history. There have been half a dozen sham duplicates of Louis XVII., and the descendant of one of them was pushing his claim in a French court only a year or two ago. There have been so many false Sebastians of Portugal that a book has been written about them. As a counterpart to this surplus, some famous figures disappear bodily from history—vanish like vapors under the sun of criticism. Danaus, Pelops, Cecrops, Deucalion, and the

other leaders of colonies who are said to have peopled Greece from Egypt and Asia, are under grave suspicion of being imaginary, chiefly because they are not mentioned in the Homeric poems the source of our knowledge of those early days. Other people who are mentioned in the Homeric poems do not thereby escape being equally set down as apocryphal; while Homer himself, as everybody knows, is accused of being a myth. But pray how could Homer hope to escape, when not only is William Tell's apple relegated to the realm of fiction, like Washington's hatchet, which Mr. Parton conclusively used up, but Tell himself is put among the mythical heroes of history? It is true that the skeptics are well matched by the loyalists and the enthusiasts. An unbelieving Wolf stirs up a Nitzsch, and sets afoot a zealous Schliemann, who has no trouble in discovering, to his own satisfaction, not only the tomb of Agamemnon, but the head-dress of Helen.

Besides the falling of trappings from heroes, and the total disappearance of historic figures from the canvas, we have a transformation of many. Mr. Froude reconstructed Henry VIII.; Mr. Meline, in "The Galaxy," rehabilitated Mary, Queen of Scots; John Lackland and Crookback Richard have found their apologists; M. Dubois-Guchan has championed Tiberius; M. Adolphe Stahr has bravely defended Nero himself, whom Herr Luchten also pronounces an amiable person, of artistic temperament, full of fancy and fine feelings, who carried off the first prize in a musical contest, and paid a soldier several hundred thousand dollars for having been much affected by his singing. How, then, can we believe theanders of Tacitus, that Nero caused his mother to be murdered and the Christians to be tortured? Advancing from Nero, we might remind our readers that Mr. Cranch once reconstructed Satan in a "Galaxy" poem—but that was rather a prehistoric character.

Then Sir John Lubbock has re-

habilitated Helen of Troy, or at least has pleaded eloquently in behalf of the spouse of Menelaus. He has told us that during a journey in Asia Minor he read up all the Homeric and ante-Homeric literature without finding aught against the good character of Helen. All antiquity respects her; the Trojan graybeards bow before her; the poets have no censure for her; Menelaus makes no complaint against her. Would thousands of Greek and Dardanian warriors have perilled their lives for a creature they despised? Who knows, asks Sir John, whether Menelaus did not drive her away by his own unmarital conduct, and whether it is not he that deserves the scorn of history?

So run the odd doubts about historic figures—doubts very easy to create, at all times, by ingenuity, as shown in Archbishop Whately's most skilful, amusing, and suggestive argument thrown into the satirical form of "Historic Doubts" concerning the existence of Napoleon Bonaparte. Almost within our own memory we have seen the character of Cromwell rehabilitated. Perhaps some of the illustrious calumniated still living may take comfort from reflecting upon the variance of historic judgments with the lapse of time.

The current histories of our civil war are full of errors of fact and inference. At least half a century will be required to eliminate the majority of these errors, while scores of them will doubtless remain. To be sure, the petty events now magnified into decisive ones will take on their true proportions in the perspective of the ages; but in details the "lie well stuck to" must often hold its own. Our current political history shows almost as many distortions, exaggerations, and flaws. One may doubt whether the art of printing, and the facilities for obtaining and transmitting news, have had their expected effect in getting at the truth of history. They cancel a great many falsehoods, but they make a great many more that require cancelling.

G. E. POND.

## THE "DEPRESSION IN BUSINESS."

THE disturbance of business which has been so marked during the past year or two has a deeper-seated cause than mere political agitation. It will be noticed that this "business depression" prevails principally at the North. We hear of little or no labor trouble, or of great stagnation of business in the South, unless in cases where the undertaking is intimately connected with a Northern trade. The reason is plain. The South is now rapidly passing out of what may be called a "transition state," and activity has taken the place of the indolence—physical, intellectual, and financial—engendered by the system of slavery.

Until within the past eight or ten years the North has been the prime factor for the South, not only in machinery, but in the very solids of their subsistence. This is now greatly changed. The South during the past two years has, according to trade reports, raised nearly enough grain of all kinds and bacon for home consumption. This cuts off from the north-west a heretofore heavy and steady market. The machine shops and foundries of New England and the east can too no longer compete successfully for the Southern trade with similar establishments now in operation at Atlanta, St. Louis, Mobile, and other points in the South that are nearer the sources of supply of the inanimate agents of production—iron, coal, water, wood, etc. As to the principal animate agent—man—the South has an immense advantage in having cheaper "cheap labor" in the blacks. Hence the South is now, to a great extent, manufacturing its own cotton-gins, factory machinery, engines, etc., and even passenger cars, all of which, in times past, were chiefly manufactured in the east, particularly in the Middle and New England States. The cost

of eastern and extreme northern made machinery, sold in competition with these Southern manufactures, is enhanced by the cost of two transportations: on the raw material to the place of manufacture and on the finished work to the home of the customer. In the matter of railroad car wheels alone a saving is effected, we believe, of about eighteen cents per one hundred pounds, over those cast in the New England States.

In regard to the complaint of the great cotton manufacturers of the North, this pertinent question arises, How can it be possible for them to manufacture cotton goods, to compete successfully with Southern factories, when the first cost of the raw material and labor is greater to them than to their rivals? It is no secret, or ought not to be, while the Board of Trade's reports and the financial and market columns of the leading journals are so accessible. In Louisiana, Georgia, Alabama, and the Carolinas the average general ruling of cotton for the last ten days of February was 0.11.625 cents, while in New York it was 0.12.75 cents, and in Boston 0.12.875 cents—a gross difference of about .01.25 cent per pound in favor of the Southern mills, to begin with.

Taking into consideration also the fact that there are now over sixty cotton mills in the Southern States—forty-one in Georgia alone—all running on full time, and thanks to their cheaper labor (in the aggregate, skilled and unskilled), as well as the reduced cost of material, all paying fair dividends, it is no cause for wonder that eastern mills shut down or were running, as is claimed, at a loss, on half time. The South is the natural location for this great and important industry; and, lying central to coal and iron, is not beyond it, as is New England—with splendid water powers and plenty





